



United States Senate

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 28, 2006

CONTACT: Jill Greenberg (Wyden), (202)224-3789

Sid Smith (Craig), (202) 224-8708

Report Lauds Significant Successes of County Payments Law

Original law co-authors Wyden and Craig are working to renew the legislation

WASHINGTON, DC -- Landmark, bipartisan "county payments" legislation authored by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Larry Craig (R-Idaho) was lauded in a new report released today by the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment. The report also recommended that the Wyden-Craig legislation be renewed before it expires later this year.

"Today's report by the Sierra Institute highlights the significant community development that's occurred nationwide because of this law," said Wyden. "Counties, timber interests and environmentalists have all come together on a range of environmental issues to ensure funding for rural communities. We've seen that this collaborative approach works, which is why the law should be renewed."

"I greatly appreciate the time and effort that went into this study. Clearly, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act has been doing what it was designed to do - supply our communities with the resources they need to broaden their economies and provide their children with a high-quality education," said Craig. "While the program is not intended to be permanent, more time is needed for it to reach the full potential."

The report, funded by the United States Forest Service (USFS), examines the impact of Resource Advisory Committees (RAC), groups designed to ensure expanded economic activity and forest restoration in the communities that take part in this program. The RACs are made up of local officials, environmentalists and timber interests.

While these are groups that may not always agree, the report found that in areas where they developed projects by consensus and were approved by the RACs, the relationship between the various factions in the communities improved. The report's Executive Summary also notes no RAC project has been appealed to an agency or challenged in a court of law.

In 2005, Wyden and Craig introduced S. 267, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, to reauthorize the county payments law for another seven years. Their bill would reauthorize the initial law, enacted in 2000, which established a six year payment formula for counties that receive revenue sharing payments for the USFS and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. Based on historical timber receipts, the formula established a stable source of revenue to be used for education, roads and various other county services in rural areas.